

Pentagon To Shift Navy Forces To Counter Rising China

By Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg.com, January 25, 2006

The Pentagon has directed the Navy to assume a "greater presence" in the western Pacific by adding at least one aircraft carrier and five nuclear submarines over the next decade, according to a draft of the Pentagon's review of strategy and forces.

The increase will put half the Navy's aircraft carriers and 60 percent of its submarine fleet in the Pacific and is largely driven by the Pentagon's concern over China's increased military might, according to a congressional defense analyst.

"They recognize they may be challenged from a modernized Chinese maritime military force," said Ronald O'Rourke, the chief naval analyst for the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service, who's written extensively on the subject. "It's intended to send a signal of their concern."

China announced last March that its military spending in 2005 would grow by 13 percent. That followed increases of 11.6 percent in 2004, 9.6 percent in 2003 and 17.6 percent in 2002.

China's military buildup is "unprecedented" and "is proceeding quite rapidly," U.S. Pacific Command commander Admiral William Fallon told Congress at the time. It includes short- and intermediate-range missiles, submarines and Russian-made Su-30 fighters, Fallon said.

The Quadrennial Defense Review will be released Feb. 6 along with the president's fiscal 2007 budget. It's being released as the U.S. continues to improve bases on the island of Guam to accommodate more nuclear submarines, Air Force B-2 bombers and unmanned drones. In addition, Japan in October agreed to allow basing of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier at Yokosuka naval base near Tokyo in 2008.

"The fleet will have greater presence in the Pacific Ocean consistent with the global shift of trade and transport," says the final draft of the review now circulating on Capitol Hill.

"Accordingly, the Navy plans to adjust its force posture and basing to provide at least six operationally available and sustainable carriers and 60 percent of its submarines in the Pacific to support engagement, presence and deterrence," the draft says.

The Navy in recent years has kept five of its 12 carriers in the Pacific with the remainder in the Atlantic and as many as 27 of its 54 submarines in the Pacific, O'Rourke said.

As part of the increased presence, the review recommends that the Pentagon in 2012 increase production of the General Dynamics Corp.-Northrop Grumman Corp. Virginia-class attack submarine to two annually from the current rate of one a year.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld at a news conference today declined to discuss the review until it is formally released.

Rumsfeld said last year after a congressional hearing that the Pentagon is "making a big effort" to "recognize the changes taking place in Asia and the kinds of capabilities the United States could be facing in 10, 15, 20 years."

"We have to try to look out with respect to China and other circumstances that can change dramatically in that period of time," he said on March 10, 2005.

Building on President George W. Bush's policy of pre-emptive defense, the draft says the U.S. "will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive or other capabilities that could enable hostile actions against the United States or other countries and will seek to deter any form of aggression or coercion," the draft said.

In a section on emerging military powers, including Russia and India, the report says "China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States." The pace and scope of China's build-up already puts other regional military balances "at risk," the draft says.

"China is likely to continue to make large investments in high-end military capabilities, emphasizing electronic and cyber-warfare, counter-space operations, ballistics and cruise missiles, next-generation torpedoes and advanced submarines," it says

These emerging capabilities, the vast distances of an Asian theater and basing challenges the U.S. would face in a potential conflict ``place a premium on forces capable of sustained operations at great distances into denied areas," according to the draft.

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U.S. policy remains ``focused on encouraging China to play a constructive, peaceful role in the Asia-Pacific region and serve as a partner addressing common security challenges," it said. ``The goal is for China to continue as an economic partner and emerge as a force for good in the region," the draft says.